

RICHARD GREEN

FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

HENRY MOORE OM CH
Castleford 1898 - 1986 Much Hadham

Ref: BT 237

Reclining figure



Signed on the base: *Moore*

Bronze: 3 ½ x 5 ½ x 2 ⅝ in / 8.9 x 14 x 6.7 cm

On a wood base: 1 x 6 ¼ x 3 ⅜ in / 2.5 x 15.9 x 8.6 cm

Conceived in terracotta in 1945 and cast *circa* 1945-46
in an unnumbered edition of 7

LH 243

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Provenance:

Private collection
Christie's New York, 16th May 1990, lot 452
Private collection, USA
Private collection, Canada
Osborne Samuel, London;
private collection, UK, acquired from the above

Exhibited:

London, Tate Gallery, *Sculpture and Drawings by Henry Moore*, Arts Council of Great Britain held on the occasion of The Festival of Britain, 2nd May-29th July 1951, pl.12a, cat. no.163, as *Reclining figure (Maquette for a sculpture in stone)*, terracotta
London, Tate Gallery, *Henry Moore*, 17th July-22nd September 1968, no.65, terracotta
London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Henry Moore*, 16th September-11th December 1988, no.103, terracotta
Chichester, Pallant House Gallery, *The Mythic Method: Classicism in British Art 1920-1950*, 22nd October 2016-19th February 2017, no.90

Literature:

Mary Sorrell, 'Henry Moore', *Apollo*, vol.44, November 1946, terracotta illus. p.117
David Sylvester (ed.), *Henry Moore Complete Sculpture 1921-1948*, vol. I, Lund Humphries, London, 1990, p.15, no.243
Pallant House Gallery Magazine, 'Classicism in British Art', no.40, Oct 2016-Feb 2017, illus. in colour p.23

Reclining figure 1945 is the sketch-model for *Memorial figure* 1945-46, Hornton stone (LH 262), sited at Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon. Another cast is in the collection of Museum Ludwig, Cologne.¹

When Henry Moore was commissioned by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst to carve a memorial to his friend Christopher Martin, the Artistic Director at Dartington Hall, the reclining figure with its stability and sense of repose suggested itself as the most appropriate arrangement, Moore stating that, 'It fits in with my belief that sculpture should be permanent, should last for eternity.'² Moore and Martin had met during the War (perhaps through Sir Kenneth Clark) when Moore became a member of the Visual Arts Group associated with the Arts Enquiry, a study of how the arts were organised in England and Wales which Martin initiated and ran. Martin came to Dartington Hall in 1934 to bring some administrative and financial order to the various arts activities there and to prepare for the introduction of the Ballet Jooss, the Jooss-Leder Dance School and the Michael Chekhov Theatre School. After his untimely death, Dorothy Elmhirst wrote: 'During the years 1935 to 1939 the Courtyard at Dartington Hall was the centre of an intense life, created largely by young people from Europe and America coming together in this corner of England to work and study. The personality that held it all together, the mind that maintained order and gave direction, and the heart that added human meaning to it all, was Chris

¹ Dorothy Elmhirst purchased two small models/bronzes of the *Reclining figure* from Moore to give to her daughter and husband for Christmas in 1947. Letters are held in the Devon Heritage Centre.

² The artist cited in Philip James, *Henry Moore on Sculpture*, MacDonald, London 1966, p.264.

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Martin's.³ Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst purchased the neglected fourteenth century Dartington estate in 1925, where they created the 'Dartington Experiment', restoring the estate buildings and setting up farming, forestry, educational and cultural projects. The experiment was formalised in 1932 with the creation of The Dartington Hall Trust, which oversaw the Elmhirsts' charitable work. Dartington drew artists, architects, writers, philosophers and musicians from around the world, including Igor Stravinsky, Benjamin Britten, TE Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia'), Bernard Leach, Walter Gropius, Moholy Nagy, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, HG Wells, Yehudi Menuhin, Ben Nicholson and Aldous Huxley, creating an exceptional centre of creative activity.⁴

Moore discovered the perfect setting for the reclining figure in the grounds of Dartington Hall and held it in mind as he created the maquettes to produce a work of sculpture in absolute harmony with the landscape loved by Martin: 'The figure is a memorial to a friend who loved the quiet mellowness of this Devonshire landscape. It is situated at the top of a rise, and when one stands near it and takes in the shape of it in relation to the vista one becomes aware that the raised knee repeats or echoes the gentle roll of the landscape. I wanted it to convey a sense of permanent tranquillity, a sense of being from which the stir and fret of human ways had been withdrawn, and all the time I was working on it I was very much aware that I was making a memorial to go into an English scene that is itself a memorial to many generations of men who have engaged in a subtle collaboration with the land.'⁵ The drapery covering the recumbent woman also suggests the swelling forms of the Devonshire landscape, its deep folds likened by Moore, 'with the form of mountains, which are the crinkled skin of the earth.'⁶ Richard Cork suggests that the sculpture may also represent a memorial to Moore's mother, who died the year before he started work on the commission.⁷

The naturalistic style of this piece and the final sculpture recalls the dignified poise of the Northampton *Madonna and Child*, 1943–44. For the critic, John Russell, 'Only once did Moore return to the untroubled majesty of the Northampton Madonna. This was the *Memorial Figure* which he completed in 1945–6 in memory of Christopher Martin. Once or twice - in the feet, for instance, and in the emblematic treatment of the right ear - this looks back to the 'progressive' idiom of the 1930s, and of course the upraised right knee is a survival from an even earlier idiom : that of the Leeds *Reclining Figure* of 1929. What Moore would not have aimed at, at any earlier time, is the gentle flowing movement of the whole piece and the dialogue between the simplified draperies and the monumental forms beneath. Once again the head and the hands are just sufficiently characterized to quicken our interest just when the piece might have begun to seem too uniformly general in tone... Moore had reached a stage in his career at which he could pick out, one by one, the points at which a piece needed to be simplified and accentuated. The *Memorial Figure* brings to an appropriately elegiac close the series of swathed human figures, drawn or carved, which derive in part from the experience of the shelter and in part from the investigation of pure sculptural form. Like the Northampton Madonna, it presents the experience of the shelter in sublimated state ; as for the investigation of form, it is carried on

³ Cited in Kate Caddy's biography of Christopher Martin on the Dartington Estate website: <https://www.dartington.org/about/dartington-our-history/people/christopher-martin>

⁴ See Dartington Heritage | 1,000 Years of History, *ibid*.

⁵ The artist cited in Philip James, *op.cit.*, 1966, p.101.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.231.

⁷ See *Henry Moore*, exh cat, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1988, p.19.

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discreetly and in such a way as to frighten no one. One might also infer, and some people did infer, that Moore by 1945 was like Prospero in Act V, scene 1: a once-terrifying figure who had abjured his rough magic. In no two pieces, certainly, is Moore's tender side so much in evidence.⁸

This work was exhibited in *The Mythic Method: Classicism in British Art 1920-1950* at Pallant House Gallery, Chichester in 2016-17, and as Simon Martin writes, reflects a wider European interest in Greco-Roman art, mythology and imagery in the aftermath of the First World War, referred to as the 'return to order.' 'Having avoided the classical during the 1920s and 1930s whilst looking to non-Western art, Moore engaged with it once again upon realising that his drawings of people sheltering in the London Underground are essentially reclining figures under drapery. This informed his illustrations for *The Return*, which is based on the story of Odysseus/Ulysses returning to his family after the Trojan War. The monumental grandeur of Moore's sculptures of draped seated figures, and his bronze *Dying Gladiator*, of the 1950s mark the apotheosis of modern classicism in Britain. His print suite *Prometheus* is a manifestation of his move towards humanism in the years after the Second World War: instead of the gods who wrought destruction and suffering on mankind, Moore focussed on Prometheus, who defied them and rejected violence and force in favour of reason and careful argument.⁹ In reference to this sculpture Martin writes, 'the drapery over Moore's *Reclining Figure* (1945) accentuates and animates the form, but also underpins the sense of how closely Moore was responding to the 1920s classical figures of Pablo Picasso, such as his painting of a draped, reclining female entitled *The Source* (1921, Moderna Museet, Stockholm). In the words of the art historian Christopher Green: 'Moore's commitment to the reclining figure places him within a continuous idea of Western classicism that brings together Picasso, the High Renaissance Italians at the Palace of Fontainebleau (so important to *The Source*) and the river goddesses of antiquity.'¹⁰

⁸ John Russell, *Henry Moore*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, pp.98-99.

⁹ Simon Martin, *The Mythic Method: Classicism in British Art 1920-1950*, exh. cat., Pallant House Gallery, Chichester 2016, p.21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.116.

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